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Draft statement of principles
and commitments

DRAFT STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

In response to a directive from the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session, this report sets out a draft statement of four fundamental principles upon which the human settlements Global Plan of Action may be based. Principles I and II are substantive, as they address the two themes recommended by the Commission on Human Settlements at its fourteenth session: (a) Sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world and (b) Adequate shelter for all. Principles III and IV are operational in their focus on the key implementing mechanisms of management and enablement. The rationale for the principles is presented in accompanying short narratives.

Because the term "commitment" is undefined in General Assembly resolution 47/180 (which calls for a general statement of principles and commitments) and because, undefined, its meaning is ambiguous, draft commitments are not presented in this report. The word might mean commitment to the principles embodied in a global plan of action or it may mean a commitment of resources for the implementation of the plan. A general statement of commitments would vary accordingly.

After review of this report and of the related draft format for the Global Plan of Action, the Preparatory Committee may wish to suggest action to:

(a) amend, substitute, augment and/or adopt the proposed principles as the basis for the Global Plan of Action and to provide additional or alternative supporting rationale based on agreement derived from its own deliberations; and

(b) define the term "commitment" as stated in General Assembly resolution 47/180 in order to provide further direction for the secretariat in developing a general statement of principles and commitments.

The Preparatory Committee may further wish to issue succinct instructions to the secretariat for finalizing the general statement of principles and commitments and for incorporating them into the Global Plan of Action.

I. PREAMBLE

A. The Mandate

1. General Assembly Resolution 47/180 set out the following objectives for the Habitat II Conference:

(a) In the long term, to arrest the deterioration of global human settlements conditions and ultimately create the conditions for achieving improvements in the living environment of all people on a sustainable basis, with special attention to the needs and contributions of women and vulnerable social groups whose quality of life and participation in development have been hampered by exclusion and inequality, affecting the poor in general;

(b) To adopt ***a general statement of principles and commitments*** and formulate a related global plan of action capable of guiding national and international efforts through the first two decades of the next century.

2. This report proposes a set of four principles for consideration by the Preparatory Committee. Two are thematic principles, related to the themes of **human settlements** and **shelter**, and two are operational principles, addressing the need for **rational management** and **enabling mechanisms** in order to marshal all available resources.

B. The challenge

3. By the year 2000, the majority of the world's population will live in urban areas. The main global challenge will be the restructuring of policies and instruments for management of urban societies in providing for basic human needs.

4. In developing and developed countries alike, the most acute predicament arising from rapid urbanization is the increasing number of people living in unhealthy, unsafe, inhumane conditions, without adequate access to employment, basic infrastructure and essential services. The lack of facilities for waste disposal, safe water supply, and sanitation is a primary factor affecting health and economic productivity. The failure to provide for social development, employment, and public safety is a principal cause of alienation, the breakdown of community structure, and social unrest. These issues, and those of shelter, energy, and transport underlie the agenda for sustainable development which can only be addressed through human settlements management and enabling strategies at the national, metropolitan, local, and community levels.

5. Economic trends in the twentieth century, driven by commodity and capital flows, have disrupted the harmony between countryside and city. One of the crucial tasks of human settlements management in the twenty-first century must be to ensure the conditions for socially equitable, economically productive, and environmentally sustainable linkages to be forged in a new rural-urban continuum.

6. Human settlements constitute the main focus for national investment

priorities and strategies. Simply increasing the allocation of scarce resources to human settlements, however, is no guarantee that benefits will reach the majority of the population. Investment and management strategies in an urbanizing society, in order to be effective, must comprehensively incorporate the contributions of society, including the poor. Innovative management processes and technologies must be enlisted to help identify, mobilize, and equitably allocate all available resources. To face the challenge, government, private, non-profit, and corporate organizations, all with interests vested in the future of cities, must be mobilized.

7. These issues emphasise the urgent need for a fresh human settlements agenda based on the compelling argument that there must be better understanding of the pivotal role that well-managed human settlements can play in bringing about equitable social development, economic growth, and a better quality of life for all. Only then can we formulate a positive vision of the urbanized world of the future which will inspire forward-looking programmes and actions.

8. Habitat II is a unique opportunity to create this positive vision and to redefine the human settlements agenda, focusing the attention of the world on the challenges of urbanisation and the future of cities.

II. PRINCIPLES

9. The number of proposed principles is intentionally brief. They respond to universal human needs. They are easy to understand and to remember. They are neutral in terms of culture and the political system. They may be invoked to help decision-makers and citizens determine the humane, the correct, path towards human settlements development.

A. Thematic principles

Principle I. Healthy, safe, and humane settlements are a basic human need.

Principle II. Healthy, safe, and affordable shelter is a basic human need.

10. Rationale: In very simple but profound terms, people everywhere value health and safety above all else. When the possibility of achieving a life without the undue ravages of hunger, thirst, and disease is within grasp, the individual will focus on security, stability, protection, freedom from fear or chaos, and the need for structure and order. When reasonable standards for health and safety have been met, the human being will look to satisfy the needs for belonging, esteem, and accomplishment.[1] Finally, unless needs can

[1]This hierarchy of needs was posited by psychologist Abraham H. Maslow and has been a factor in much subsequent research on human motivation. While critics point out that, as a strict hierarchy, Maslow's construct has its faults, it is a useful basis for a discussion of human needs and values.

be satisfied within the means available, for those in need there is no solution. Increasing the available means, including through employment opportunity for the poor, is therefore an important element in the provision of shelter and equitable human settlements development.

11. If these two thematic principles are recognized, substantive programmes and subprogrammes to create sustainable human settlements and to provide adequate shelter for all, have a foundation in reason and may, therefore, be more effectively organised and implemented.

B. Operational principles

Principle III. **Meeting basic human needs for settlement and shelter depends upon the efficient mobilization and rational management of all available resources.**

Principle IV. **Full mobilization of available human resources depends upon enabling people to fully participate in decision-making processes for human settlements and shelter development.**

12. Rationale: The key elements in these two interrelated principles are management and participation. They relate, respectively, to the top-down and bottom-up approaches to meeting human needs. Especially where resources are insufficient to satisfy all demands, both approaches are required: management to set priorities and to make the necessary trade-offs in allocating resources; and participation to bring to bear fully the latent array of human capabilities available to help create sustainable human settlements and adequate shelter for all. If the close relationship between these two basic approaches is recognized, integrated mechanisms to implement substantive programmes may be formulated and applied to achieve a greater overall effectiveness.

III. CONCLUSIONS

13. The principles resulting from the Vancouver conference on human settlements in 1976 numbered several dozen. There was little unification or commonality to their structure and organisation, and most of them were prescriptive and patronizing in tone. Resulting from a vigorous negotiating process -- which may be inimical to the very idea of globality -- the principles, for the most part, tended to reflect less than universal values. Subsequently, most have not been used as guidelines for decision-making over the intervening twenty years.

14. The four principles proposed herein do attempt to reflect needs of the human being -- all human beings -- in an urbanising world. In such a world, rapid change and swiftly growing problems tempt decision-makers to take urgent action without consulting all stakeholders or without obtaining objective information in order to set rational priorities for allocation of scarce resources. The decision-maker, on the other hand, may simply be unable to determine what the next steps ought to be and, consequently, takes no action on

critical issues.

15. Strengthening of management and of public participation processes in decision-making are the two principles that should undergird all human settlements and shelter development. From these will flow and better directed decision-making and more effective programmes for implementing decisions.

ANNEX I

A note on sustainability

1. Starting from the central goal of Habitat II -- improving the living environments of all on a sustainable basis -- it must be asked, what is a universal definition of sustainable?

2. With regard to human settlements, sustainability refers mainly to sustainability of the natural environment, within which human life may flourish or fade. Sustainability implies perpetuation. Of the three components of the human milieu -- economic, social, and environmental -- only environmental sustainability is critical to the perpetuation of the species.
18. Humans are both economically and culturally adaptable, leaving behind old methods of production when economies fail and old habits and traditions when societies fail. When the environment fails, however, there is diminished possibility for human economic and social adaptation. Human history argues against the practicability, and even the desirability, of economic and social perpetuation and for the necessity of environmental sustainability.

3. This is not to ignore social and economic needs. The ideas expressed in the terms "social sustainability" or "economic sustainability", however, are related more to the adjustments which are necessary for economic and social improvement to occur. The whole set of concepts expressed in the second half of the term "sustainable development" addresses the adaptation of social and economic structures to create more equitable, just, and robust communities. By equating social and economic sustainability with environmental or ecological sustainability, however, the concepts are politicized, making it possible for dominant interest groups to argue that what exists is better than what ought to exist. This allows for the perpetuation of inequitable social structures and environmentally harmful economic activities, among other characteristics of both developing and developed countries.

4. Because of the lack of definition of sustainable (and the subsequent possibility of its misapplication) the word is not contained in the four principles proposed in this report.

ANNEX II

Other models for a set of principles

A. Agenda 21

1. Both the substance and format for the 27 principles proclaimed by the Rio Declaration in 1992 may be considered by the Preparatory Committee as being appropriate to sustainable development of human settlements. Some of the 27 are directly applicable, as for example Principle 8:

> *To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.*

This principle supports the idea that sustainability refers primarily to the environment and that economies and social structures must be made more adaptable.

2. Other Agenda 21 principles may have only indirect applicability, as does Principle 14:

> *States should effectively cooperate to discourage or prevent the relocation and transfer to other States of any activities and substances that cause severe environmental degradation or are found to be harmful to human health.*

3. In general, the Agenda 21 principles tend to be prescriptive and/or mandatory, as in Principle 5:

> *All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people in the world.*

4. Without engaging in an argument over precise applicability of each principle, the way in which they are expressed, and whether some of them should be modified and adapted as part of a set of human settlements principles, the Preparatory Committee may wish to simply adopt all 27 principles from Agenda 21 by reference as being subsumed under the proposed four principles, above.

B. World summit for social development

5. In the documentation on the 1995 World Summit for Social Development that was available to the secretariat prior to the preparation of this report, there was no reference made to a set of principles that will result from that Conference. Neither the summary presentation by the President of Economic and Social Council, Ambassador Juan Somavia, nor the report of the Secretary-

General at the substantive session of 1993 contain any reference to either a

global plan of action or a set of principles, although the latter document refers to a review of major social goals and targets adopted by the United Nations system. As a model for, or a source of, principles related to human settlements, therefore, the preparatory process for the World Summit does not yet provide much insight. It does, however, provide an alternative model of a null set of principles.